

Black History Month And Celebrating Diversity - In a Barber Shop

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Believe it or not, it took the Sons of the Confederate Veterans camp (No.1282) to remind me that it is Black History Month. I've just been too busy. So, we all need to spend now until February 29, 2000 "celebrating diversity." After that, we can all go back to hating each other.

For those of you who don't know, the wife and I are on another business trip outside of the country.

To us that means, "Somewhere east of the Rocky Mountains."

We are in a flat swamp known as the Tampa – St. Petersburg Metroplex, where, like in other places, we have to learn our way around town – fast, for various reasons. More on that in a few... In this case, I needed a barber – bad. Here's the story:



First, take a look at this mug shot right here. Until about two hours before this article was written, I did not look like that. My hairdo belonged on the front cover of National Geographic, and one of Florida's finest had already stopped me, asking for my green card, and making references to boxing promoter Don King.

Time for this black dude to get clipped.

Now, some dirty little secrets about black folks.

Diversity and tolerance may be a noble thing, but not when it comes to my hair. Sorry, I'm an admitted bigot in these areas, based solely on past experience. Thus I need – no...I *want* a black barber. But to do that, I first have to find "the hood."

(Translation for the white folk: "The Urban, African American Community.")

We travel a lot, and like I said, we have to learn our way around any area in a hurry. In most cases, it's even easier for us black folks. Simply grab a map, look for the street named, "Martin Luther King" Avenue, Boulevard, etc., saddle up the horse and ride yonder. That's a little, closely guarded secret among us "dark long riders." Works in every city in America.

But not in St. Petersburg, Florida. MLK Avenue has apparently been infested with Caucasians on the north end. This, in the so-called "racist" south?

With no black barber in sight, I try the next best thing. Find a black guy and ask him. Didn't take long to find one of St. Pete's Finest grabbing a smoke outside, taking a break from his police duties. Good time to talk to the "homee" - (that's 'fellow black man' to you white folk.)

"Yo, brotha, where can a man get a haircut 'round here?"

"No, problem, sir. I'll hook you right up."

And from there I was directed right into the "hood" for a black barber.

Let's stop right here a minute...

You notice I didn't say, "where's a black barber?" Didn't have to. You see, this is what is known as a "black thing." There was probably a barber near by, but he and I both knew the reality...

...Some of you white folks are murder on black people's hair.

He suggested a particular barber that I should visit. His directions were good. And like I expected, all those federal tax dollars sent in to fix all the urban blight, created more urban blight and more unemployed brothas walking the streets.

Ahh...home.

I dismounted off my rental horse to find a barber-shop door wide open, and the chair empty.

"Lookin' for the barber?" The man sitting on the curb asked.

"Yes, I am. Is he in the back or something?"

No, he wasn't. And I wish that cop would have known about the little problem that occurred in the hood the night before. It would have saved me a lot of time and trouble...

The barber didn't make bail last night.

Okay, now I'm desperate. So, off to the Great White Suburbia I go. English speaking, of course.

The bad experiences I've had with most white barbers is the reason I avoid the red, white and blue peppermint stick, Norman Rockwell - type barbers. When I look in the window and see the guy with the light blue barber jacket and blue hair, this is not the place for me. Nor do I need to sit there waiting, listening to old jokes about Hillary, how great a president FDR was, and as a matter of fact, "How 'bout them Brooklyn Dodgers!"

Not that I'm a bigot - it's that I feel completely confident that these types have no idea how to cut a black man's hair without the police around. So I take a wide berth around these places. They have proven their experience with Afro hair-slicing techniques on more than one occasion.

How bad was it? Well, one guy actually made me pay him for his experimentation - and the Band-Aids.

This leads me to the more progressive barbers...I'm sorry, "hair stylists." You know - places where you get sick of seeing Paul Mitchell's name and face all over everything, where the people can't quite decide what color to dye their hair, and everyone in the place - (male and female) has the first name of "Stephanie."

This is where the diversity comes in. I needed a haircut like I need water. Therefore, I had to overlook the pierced ears, noses, lips, tongues, nipples and belly buttons. I had to ignore whatever it was dripping from their hairdos. But whatever it was, I'm sure it would put Valvoline out of business. I even overlooked the fact that one barber for some reason kept one wrist bent at a 90 degree angle the whole time I was in the barber chair.

See, I had to overlook the differences in people, because I needed a service.

Actually they did a pretty good job. There was a brief moment when four hair-stylists had to have a group discussion on which set of hair clippers to use on my hair, but no matter – I survived the torture.

There are a few tips however, that I'd like to give to some of you Generation X, whitepeople.com-type folks that will help you when cutting black people's hair, and might even cause them to return one day.

1. No giggling. We can see you in the mirror. I know you hair-stylists had to practice cutting these SOS pads on black people in "junior hair burner school" so quit acting like it's a new experience – even if our hair does tickle.
2. As a matter of fact, it's NOT the same thing as mowing a lawn.
3. Forget the barber scissors. It's a waist of time.
4. Please do not offer us espresso while you work. Do you know what those hair clippings can do to a person's throat?
5. And finally – Quit trying to sell us Rogaine! If a black man says "cut if all off," then dammit, just cut it off. Thanks to the NBA and certain popular rap artists, black men don't have to worry about going bald anymore.

What a way to celebrate diversity – at a barber shop.